

HISTORY SET RIGHT.

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A T T A C K

ON

New Orleans and its Defenses,

BY THE FLEET UNDER

ADMIRAL FARRAGUT.

April 24, 1862.

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NEW YORK:
OFFICE OF THE ARMY AND NAVY JOURNAL.
1869.

*The Magazine of American
History.
New York Sept. 1878*

A CHIP OF THE OLD BLOCK.—Congress, in April last, authorized the acceptance by Lieutenant Theodorus Bailey Myers Mason to accept a medal conferred upon him by King Victor Emanuel for an act of unusual self-devotion and daring. When flag-lieutenant of the South Pacific Squadron he descended, with three sailors, all volunteers, into the lower hold of an Italian barque, the Adelaide, then lying in the harbor of Callao, laden with powder and railroad supplies, and in flames. Putting aside the kegs of powder, Lieutenant

Mason reached the fire and extinguished it with the Babcock apparatus. This is not the first of his gallant actions. Some years since, while still a midshipman, he received the medal of the Humane Society, and a decoration from the Emperor of Brazil for the successful saving of life.

In his name Lieutenant Mason continues, in honorable record, in the service that of his uncle, Admiral Theodorus Bailey, who led the van of Farragut's fleet through the obstructions, past the forts on the Mississippi and took the surrender of New Orleans. The career of this brave officer was noticed in the Magazine, March, 1877. EDITOR.

[FROM THE ARMY AND NAVY JOURNAL OF JULY 17, 1869.]

HISTORY SET RIGHT.

THE following correspondence is reproduced from the files of the Navy Department. We publish it in justice both to the truth of history and to the reputation of those gallant officers whom it most concerns.

REAR-ADMIRAL BAILEY TO ADMIRAL FARRAGUT.

WASHINGTON, D. C., April 1, 1869.

MY DEAR ADMIRAL : I feel compelled to call your attention to an oversight of which I spoke to you some time since, and which has afforded me and other officers the keenest annoyance, by historical statements growing out of the omission to make the desired correction.

You recollect that when the *Colorado*, under my command, was found (after lightening her) to draw too much water to be got over the bar into the Mississippi River, I applied to you for the command of a division of gunboats, and coveted the honor of leading, under your orders, the attack on New Orleans and its defenses. Having been assigned by you to the command of a division of your fleet, with your concurrence, and at the request of Commander J. P. Lee, I hoisted my divisional flag on board the steam sloop-of-war *Oneida*, commanded by him. On the 20th of April, 1862, you issued a General Order, with a programme directing the fleet to pass the forts and ascend the river in two columns abreast. You, in your flag-ship, the *Hartford*, at the head of one column, and I at the head of the other. About this time Commander Lee expressed a regret that he had invited me to lead my division in his vessel, the *Oneida*, alleging as a reason that I would get the credit for what might be achieved by his vessel. Lieutenant-Commanding Harrison immediately begged me to hoist my divisional flag on board of his little gunboat,

the *Cayuga*, and give him a chance to lead the division, which, on going on board of your flag-ship and stating the facts, you kindly consented to my doing ; and on giving the gallant Harrison the opportunity he sought, the *Oncida*, Commander Lee, was assigned a position further astern. After the chain and booms, constituting the enemy's obstructions, were cut by Captain Bell and Lieutenant Caldwell, it became apparent that if the fleet went up in two columns abreast, according to your written order and programme of the 20th of April, the parallel columns of vessels would likely get foul of the obstructions on either side, and the whole fleet be hove into confusion under the fire of the enemy's forts, especially as you had determined to make a night attack (two o'clock in the morning). Therefore, with your proverbial foresight and sagacity, you ordered me to get my division of eight vessels under way as soon as the dusk of the evening should obscure the movement from the enemy, and anchor them, line ahead, near the east bank, and gave me a further verbal order, directing me that when the signal should be made (two red lights) from the *Hartford*, to lead up with my division and to receive but not answer the fire of Fort Jackson (which I was directed to leave for you to take care of when you should come up, as you expressed it, "I will take care of Fort Jackson). I was then to open on Fort St. Philip and pass it ; but you directed that in case at any time you should come up in the *Hartford*, we should leave room for you on the port or west side. I accordingly passed up at the head of my division (in the *Cayuga*) receiving but not returning the fire of Fort Jackson. After passing the obstructions I ordered the helm put a-port and led close to the levee, and under the guns of Fort St. Philip, thinking that the guns of that fort would be trained and sighted for mid-river, and that they would consequently overshoot me (which they did, their shot and shell riddling our masts, spars, sails and rigging with comparative little damage to the hulls.) At this time something occurred to the *Pensacola's* machinery, which caused a detention of the vessels of my division astern of her. Losing sight of them, we in the *Cayuga*, alone, encountered the Rebel iron-clads, *Louisiana* and *Manassas* and their flotilla of gunboats, and maintained unaided a conflict with them until Boggs in the *Varuna* came up, and after delivering a broadside, which came into the *Cayuga* as well as into the enemy in conflict with us, he passed up the river out of sight. The *Oncida*, Commander Lee, came up soon after and fired into a steamer that had already surrendered to the *Cayuga* (being her third prize). I then ordered Lee to go to the assistance of Boggs of the *Varuna*, then engaged

with two of the enemy's steamers up the river, which had been drawn off from their attack on us of the *Cayuga*, to follow and head off Boggs in the *Varuna*. After seeing our (*Cayuga's*) third prize in flames, we steamed up the river and captured the Chalmette regiment, encamped on the west bank of the river opposite the Quarantine Hospital. This Rebel regiment of infantry I had the honor to hand over to you for your disposition when you came up the river after your severe contest with the forts and fire-ships below.

To give a history of all the incidents of the battle within my observation or the part which each vessel of my division took, would make this communication too long.

The great object of this letter is to call your attention to the fact that in the hurry of making up your dispatches after the battle, you sent home the written order of the 20th of April, which has been published and has passed into history, instead of your verbal order of the 23d, which was the one in accordance with which the fleet passed up the river and the battle was fought.

This error has resulted in an inextricable historical muddle, as the history of the battle has been written on the basis of the published programme of April 20th, never carried out; the formation and position of the attacking force being therefore entirely misunderstood by the historians. One (Rev. Mr. Boynton's) history not even mentioning me, although it did those of officers commanding vessels under me. My name was merely inserted (as commanding a division) at the instance of a friend, who discovered the omission too late to make a further correction. The resolution of the United States Senate of June 6, 1862 and accompanying Documents, of which 2,000 were printed, perpetuates the error of our passing the forts in two columns abreast. Mr. Greeley in his "American Conflict," and other authors, are led into the same misstatements. "Lossing's Pictorial History" erroneously describes the *Cayuga* as retiring from the fight on account of her damages, whereas she was continually in action notwithstanding she was much cut up with forty-two shot-holes. The *Varuna*, which had passed us while heavily engaged, went up the river and drew off three of the *Cayuga's* assailants. The fight of the *Varuna* with two of which is treated as the great event of the battle, while the leading up and heavy single-hand fighting of the *Cayuga* (Harrison's gunboat), her taking the surrender of three enemy's steamers, the Chalmette regiment of infantry, and cutting the telegraphic communication between the forts and New Orleans, and other circumstances, are not mentioned. Now, as I do not wish to be com-

pelled, even in justice to myself, or the officers of my division, to go into the system of correcting history by pamphleteering or newspaper articles now so common, I must ask of you to correct this error, which I know you will not hesitate to do, seeing how much annoyance it is giving your friends and followers; or, if you still have any delicacy in doing this, as you appeared to have when I spoke to you before, in consequence of a regulation of the Department that you seemed to consider in the way, may I ask if you see any impropriety in my requesting a Board of Inquiry, in order to get the facts on record, since the truth of history, my duty to my officers, and to my family, requires that I should see it done while I am here to do it. I have the honor to be, respectfully,

Your obedient servant,

THEODORUS BAILEY,
Rear-Admiral, U. S. Navy.

To Admiral D. G. Farragut, U. S. Navy.

ADMIRAL FARRAGUT IN REPLY.

NEW YORK, April 3. 1869.

MY DEAR ADMIRAL: I have received your letter of the 1st, and am really at a loss to understand how you, or even historians, can take the views you express in relation to the part in the memorable fight in the Mississippi in 1862.

I have just re-read my report of May 6th, and your two reports following, and cannot conceive how you could be more prominently mentioned to the Department.

In the former you are reported as "leading the right column in the gunboat *Cayuga*," as having "preceded me up to the Quarantine Station," and as having "captured the Chalmette regiment," and every possible credit is given you for the manner in which you conducted your line, and preceding us to attack the Chalmette forts.

As to historians, I can, of course do nothing. I have read but one account to which you allude (Dr. Boynton's), and that in reference to Mobile Bay, in which several mistakes occur, going to prove that historians are not always correct.

I do not see how it is possible for me to give you greater credit for

your services than is embodied in that report where your name is always prominent ; but if you think that full credit has not been done you, which I confess I regret to learn, you have, of course, a perfect right to make your appeal to the Department ; for my own part, I always maintain the conviction that whatever errors may be made in the records of historians and others, posterity will always give justice to whom justice is due.

Very truly yours,

D. G. FARRAGUT, Admiral.

Rear-Admiral T. Bailey, U. S. Navy.

P. S.—By referring to pages 334 and 335-337, of Draper's history, you will find that he gives you all the credit claimed by your own report, as well as that given you by mine.

D. G. F.

RESPONSE OF REAR-ADMIRAL BAILEY.

WASHINGTON, D. C., April 27, 1869.

MY DEAR ADMIRAL: I have received and carefully read your letter of the 3d, in reply to mine of the 1st instant, and admit all you say about prominently mentioning my name to the Department. But you remark : "As to historians, I can do nothing." This is so ; but the difficulty is, that the historians derived their erroneous account of the battle from your report of the 6th of May, 1862, and from the diagram which you sent to the Department, as the true order of sailing into the battle with the forts. Those who have written on the subject are not to be blamed for using the official reports of the occurrences ; but in seeking for the correction of that report, I hope to prevent similar error and confusion in the future. I do so with the greatest reluctance, as a duty to the officers under my immediate command, and to myself, and I appeal to your sense of justice whether I could do less.

You state, "I have just re-read my (your) report of May 6th, and your (my) two reports following, and cannot conceive how you could be more prominently mentioned to the Department." "In the former you are reported as leading the right column in the gunboat *Cayuga*, and as having preceded me to the Quarantine Station."

How could there have been a "right" and a left column practically, when I led my division to the attack and passage of the forts an hour

before you lifted anchors in the *Hartford*, and your centre division? What I did was done by your orders and inspiration, and to you the world has given the credit of the attack and its success, as fully as it gave to Lord Nelson the credit of the battle of the Nile; but did it detract from his glory that the report of the battle *described how it was fought*, and the exact position of his own vessel, and those of his subordinates?

This matter has been the subject of much discussion among officers then commanding vessels *in my division*; all say that no vessel of your centre division, came up abreast of, or lapped their vessels. Practically, the effect of your verbal order was, to divide the fleet into four divisions, viz :

1st. The mortar fleet, Commander Porter.

2d. The first division of the gunboats, under my command, to which was added the two sloops-of-war *Pensacola* and *Mississippi*, of which the gunboat *Cayuga* (with my divisional flag) was the leading vessel.

3d. The centre division, with your flag on the *Hartford*, and

4th. The rear division, bearing the flag of Captain H. H. Bell.

The first, centre, and rear divisions went up to the attack in single file, or line ahead. I went up at the head of my division at 2 A. M., or as soon thereafter as it took the *Pensacola* (the next vessel astern of the *Cayuga*), to purchase her anchors—supposed to be about twenty minutes. You followed without lapping the sternmost vessel of my division, and the division of gunboats commanded by Captain Bell followed in the wake of your Division. The fact practically was that the First division, the mortar fleet, covered the advance, the Second was the vanguard, the Third the main body of the fleet, and the Fourth the rear, and that the advance being made up a river and line ahead, the diagram does not give any idea of the action other than to produce confusion and error. How could it be otherwise, when no vessel of the Third division lapped any one of the Second?

I enclose a copy of this (to us) unfortunate diagram, as attached to your report of the battle, which you will notice places the *Cayuga* (my flag gunboat) third in line of my division, whereas, according to your own statement (of two columns abreast), that gunboat should have been recorded as first in line, leading. I would ask of your friendship and your fairness whether this diagram gives the faintest idea of the action, and whether if the names of the vessels were altered, it would not apply equally well or better to many other battles.

ORDER OF FLEET.

2d div. gunboats, Capt. Bell.

- * Winona,
Lt. Com'g Nichols.
- * Itasca,
Lt. Com'g Caldwell.
- * Pinola,
Lt. Com'g Crosby.
- * Kennebec,
Lt. Com'g Russell.
- * Iroquois,
Commander DeCamp.
- * Sciota,
Lt. Com'g Donaldson.

1st div. of ships.

- * Richmond,
Commander Alden.
- * Brooklyn,
Captain Craven.
- * Hartford,
Com'der Wainwright.

1st division gunboats, Captain Bailey.

- * Wissahickon,
Lt. Com'g A. Smith.
- * Kiueo,
Lt. Com'g Ransom.
- * Katahdin,
Lt. Com'g Preble.
- * Varuna,
Commander Beggs.
- * Onaida,
Commander Lee.
- * Cayuga,
Lt. Com'g Harrison.

2d div. of ships.

- * Mississippi,
Commander M. Smith.
- * Pensacola,
Captain Morris.

As an evidence how far the *Cayuga* was ahead of the rest of the fleet, the first news received at the North is announced in the New York *Times* of Sunday, April 27, 1862, thus: "An important report from the Rebels.—One of our gunboats above Forts Jackson, and San Philip. Washington, Saturday, April 26th. The Richmond *Examiner* of the 25th announces that one of our gunboats passed Forts Jackson, and San Philip, sixty miles below New Orleans, on the 24th. The report was telegraphed to Norfolk, and brought to Fortress Monroe, under a flag of truce, and received from there to-day by the Navy Department."

The next Rebel telegram announced the arrival of the fleet before the city. The *Cayuga* in the interval had captured the Chalmette regiment, five miles above the forts, and cut the telegraphic communication, so that the fleet were not again reported until they arrived opposite the city.

Now, my dear Admiral, you have entirely misconceived the object of my addressing you. It is not to complain that you have not mentioned me prominently in your dispatch, but it is because in your report of the battle, dated May 6th, and the accompanying diagram, you do not give the circumstances of the fight as they occurred, but those which would apply to your former plan, which was abandoned. From that report, the reader would infer that the fleet went to the attack of the forts in two columns abreast, when it was done in single column (line ahead)—that the *Hartford* was the leading vessel, when in reality it was ninth in line astern of the *Cayuga*, in a single line or line ahead, and there was no left or right of line, but single file.

That you should for a moment leave so erroneous a report or record uncorrected, is a matter of surprise to your officers, and that you should not have made the correction as soon as your attention was called to it, is still more embarrassing to us.

They know that under your orders, I led the vanguard of your fleet, not as represented on the diagram you have filed, but in an entirely different order, and received forty-two certificates in the way of rebel shots striking my vessel, in corroboration of what is known to every one of our gallant companions in that engagement.

I have delayed my reply, both because I have been occupied, and since have heard you were ill, which I deeply regretted, and because I wished to be certain that I said nothing in haste that would be annoying to you, or improper in me to say, and I hope you will now see the matter as I and others do, and make the correction so necessary to justice in your report dated May 6, 1862, and substitute a diagram of the actual positions your vessels and officers occupied in the line of attack, in place of those now on the files of the Navy Department.

I have the honor to be,

Respectfully, your obedient servant,

THEODORUS BAILEY, Rear-Admiral.

Admiral D. G. Farragut, U. S. Navy.

CORRECTION BY ADMIRAL FARRAGUT.

NEW YORK, May 19, 1869.

MY DEAR ADMIRAL: I have received your two letters, the first one of which was not given to me until to-day, as my physician has advised a total suspension of business until I should become fully convalescent, which, I am happy to say, is now the case. It affords me pleasure to make the correction you desire, in the diagram of the Mississippi battle, as I now fully comprehend what you wish in this matter. In fact, I cannot understand how this sketch of the first proposed order of battle—wherein you are placed *third* instead of at the head of the column—should have been attached to the report in lieu of the one which was afterward adopted.

By referring to this report, you will observe that the diagram accompanies a general order, issued four days before the action, as a preparatory plan of attack, which was subsequently changed. But, still, I cannot understand why, even in this sketch, you should not have been placed at the head of the starboard column.

This diagram, as you are aware, was the original plan, to be changed, as a matter of course, as circumstances might justify, and the vessels were placed according to the rank of the officers respectively commanding them; but should not have been made part of the report of the final action, as, on reflection, I decided that when the chains were parted the plan of "line ahead" should be adopted, as the best calculated for the preservation of the vessels and for avoiding all chances of fouling. Therefore, when the time arrived, and the signal given, the order of sailing was changed to line of battle, the verbal instructions to which you allude carried out, and you led at the head of your division, and it has always afforded me the greatest pleasure to say that you performed your duties most fearlessly and gallantly.

For this reason I was, at the outset, a little surprised that you should have apparently complained of my report, but my examination of the printed diagram has fully satisfied me of the justice of your appeal.

I shall, therefore, forward to the Department a correct sketch of the final attack as we passed up the river. I am, very truly, your friend and obedient servant.

D. G. FARRAGUT, Admiral U. S. N.

Rear-Admiral T. Bailey, Washington.

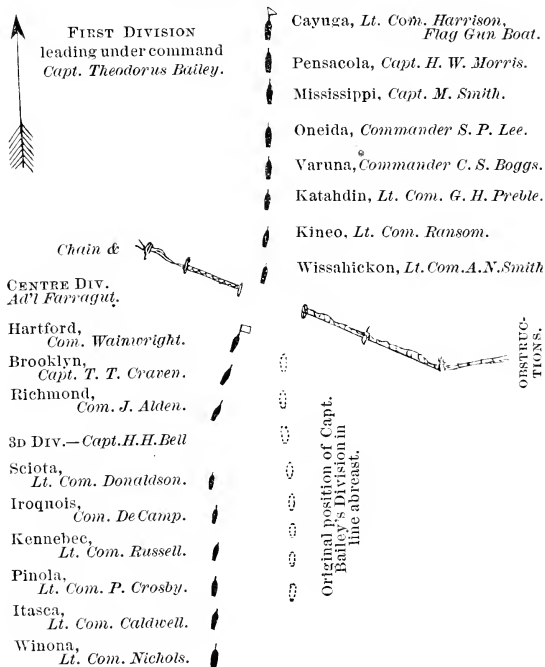
THE CORRECTED DIAGRAM.

Copied from the amended diagram on file in the Navy Department,
and certified to be a true copy.

June 2d, 1869.

(signed) HOLMES E. OFFLEY, *Chief Clerk.*

*Order of the Fleet in passing up to the attack of Forts Jackson and
St. Philip, April 24th, 1862.*



Very respectfully,

(signed) D. G. FARRAGUT.

LETTERS TO THE SECRETARY OF THE NAVY.

NEW YORK, May 24, 1869.

SIR: My attention having been called by Rear-Admiral Bailey to an incorrect sketch which accompanied my report of May 6, 1862, upon the passage of Forts Jackson and St. Philip, I have the honor to forward herewith, a corrected diagram, showing the position of the vessels at the time they passed through the obstructions after the chains had been separated. This will demonstrate that Rear-Admiral (then Captain) Bailey led the fleet, in the *Cayuga*, up to the attack on the forts, as had been previously ordered, he taking St. Philip with his division, while I reserved Jackson for the remainder of the squadron under my command.

The skeleton lines show how the vessels moved up from the original position of two lines into the line ahead.

This correction has not been made before, because I was not aware of the existence of the mistake—the diagram being, evidently, a clerical error—and in opposition to the text, in which I distinctly state that Rear-Admiral Bailey not only led, but performed his duty with great gallantry, to which I called the attention of the Department.

Very respectfully, your obedient servant,

D. G. FARRAGUT, Admiral U. S. N.

Hon. A. E. Borie, Secretary of the Navy, Washington.

WASHINGTON, D. C., May 25, 1869.

Hon. A. E. BORIE, Secretary of the Navy.

SIR: I have the honor to enclose herewith, original and certified copies of a correspondence which I have had with Admiral D. G. Farragut, relating to the battle below New Orleans, and to request that the letters marked from A to E, be placed on the files of the Navy Department, as furnishing a correction of that officer's report, with an accompanying diagram heretofore made to the Department.

The object of my addressing Admiral Farragut is now gained, by the admission on his part, of the correctness of my statements, that the fleet under his command, went up the Mississippi River to attack and pass Forts Jackson, and St. Philip, in order of battle, "line ahead," or single file; that I led the fleet into the battle at the head of, and in

command of, the Vanguard Division ; and that the *Hartford* flag-ship, with Admiral Farragut on board, followed my division, he being thus ninth in line, and at the head of the rest of the fleet in the order represented by the list of vessels which I hereto annex. After this frank admission by my distinguished commander, I have only the regret remaining, that the error into which he was led, was not discovered and corrected at an earlier date, thereby possibly affecting my position in the service.

I have the honor to be,

Respectfully, your obedient servant,

THEODORUS BAILEY, Rear Admiral U. S. Navy.

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